

specialist but several from the management consulting world. PR firms are falling behind the eight ball -- not practicing strategic counsel, acting as vendors/tacticians, not encouraging clients to invest in research prior to jumping off the dock. Management consulting firms greatest fear is media relations (they just can't do it)

- Council of PR Firms is commissioning a study correlating the Fortune most-admired companies with their pr budgets -- does one impact the other
- Felton & Bergen both: design a study on the bottomline impact of pr from a behavioral perspective. Funding is there if design is created

Cry of the conference: "give practitioners what they want"

ITEMS OF IMPORTANCE TO PRACTITIONERS

¶ **Universal Accreditation exam shows improved results**, with 68% pass rate (144 of 213 candidates). Spring exam was the first time candidates used a standardized textbook, a new APR study guide & an online study course. Fall exam will be September 10-19, registration deadline is August 10.

¶ **Nominations sought for national employee recognition award.** WorkWise Award, sponsored by Universal Press Syndicate & WorkWise columnist Dr. Mildred Culp, recognizes innovation in improving the workplace in commercial enterprises of any kind around the world. Areas include: employee training, team-building & recognition strategies; incentives for cost-cutting & customer retention; conflict resolution (inter & intra-company); and sales & marketing techniques. Nominations will be accepted from August 1 - October 15. (More from Kathie Kerr at 800/255-6734 x6945)

¶ **"Morbid" but accurate way of viewing role of practitioners:** We're like the mortician at a funeral -- do most of the work, advise on critical decisions, but do not take part in the service. Clergy & family members speak, the choir sings -- while we're in the wings seeing it all goes smoothly & attendees' psychological needs are met.

WHO'S WHO IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

NOMINATED. PRSA officers: chair-elect, Kathy Lewton (svp, Healthcare/Biotech, Fleishman-Hillard NYC); treas, Mike McDermott (Iona College, New Rochelle, NY); secty, Deanna Pelfrey (Pelfrey Assoc, Louisville). Nominated as directors-at-large: Mitch Head (Peanut Advisory Bd, Atlanta); Sandra Longcrier (Southwestern

Bell, Oklahoma City); Judith Phair (U Maryland Biotechnology Institute, Towson); Steve Shivinsky (Mercy Health Services, Farmington Hills, Mich); David Simon (cnslt, Sherman Oaks, Calif); Bob Stack (Stack Mktg Com'ns, Palm Beach, Fla). The slate will be presented to the PRSA Assembly at the Nat'l Conf on October 23.

AS TRUST & CONFIDENCE PROBLEMS PERVADE, RESEARCH DOES, TOO; BUT PRSA STUDY CLAIMS PEOPLE NOT CYNICAL & SKEPTICAL

As PRSA Foundation's Credibility Index announces its findings, "Building Organizational Trust across Cultures" is funded by IABC Research Fdn.

PRSA study was commissioned to investigate the emphasis on & importance of trust & credibility, using a mechanism designed for periodic measurement. As John Budd pointed out during project design, "Our world does not need another poll. Credibility is a bottomline function. It directly impacts decisionmaking, is immediate & specific."

CONCLUSIONS & IMPLICATIONS -- INCLUDING SOME THAT REFUTE COMMON WISDOM:

1. Local public figures often have higher credibility than national figures
2. Those most credible are often ignored in public debate [Most useful & important finding of the study]
3. The public is not mired in skepticism & cynicism [Kettering studies (prr 9/5/94 & 10/25/93) found public wanting to get involved but feeling pushed out by clique of media/officeholders/special interests -- yet labeled the result cynicism. If this has changed, great news for practitioners]
4. News media credibility greater than anticipated [Media's own research finds the opposite, e.g. prr 4/19 & many other prr stories -- so perhaps key is in what one anticipates re media]
5. Partisanship disappears on foreign issues [prr 12/15/97 confirms this]
6. Clinton-Lewinsky has affected level of credibility but has been compartmentalized to presidency
7. Credibility is a major casualty of the criminal justice system [As most recently illustrated by Ken Starr's performance in Clinton-Lewinsky]

Trust should not be confused with credibility. As Jack Felton said later at Educator's Academy, why is trust assumed to be positive? If you trust your father will come home every night to beat you, then trust is negative. Trust is deeper, less volatile; credibility is temporary & more fragile.

ONE FINDING AFFIRMS DEFINITION OF OPINION LEADERS

Demographics & cross-tabs indicate those persons 1) affiliated with a political party, 2) who actively vote



& 3) attend church at least once a year are more likely to have "assumed" credibility on a particular issue.

RAISES IMPORTANT QUERY FOR THE PROFESSION

Identified as an opportunity for pr was this finding: Persons with a h.s. degree or less are more likely to view pr as less credible. This helps explain pr's 42nd place in credibility on a chart of 44 "public figures". Question for pr is: If we're counselors, strategists & trainers -- not spokespersons, but the ones who prepare managers, employees & 3rd parties to speak -- does our external credibility matter?

Besides, how could we expect credibility when everyone knows we represent our org's/clients? Being trusted & known to be objective is another matter. But credibility on a particular topic...??

WHY A NATIONAL CREDIBILITY INDEX?

- Credibility is a keystone to concepts of prestige & integrity such as reputation, confidence or trust
- Identifying the nature & degree of credibility will improve the nature of public debate
- To give definition & exactness to credibility as fundamentally a concept of "information" & "communication" [??? *What about all the research that shows relationships are key here, Diffusion Process to name one???*]
- To develop a methodology to measure & monitor credibility in different contexts, at different times, among different constituencies

IABC SEEKING SIMILAR DATA, WILL HELP VERIFY PRSA DATA

Conducted by Pamela Shockley-Zalabak & Kathleen Ellis of U Colorado -- Colorado Springs, Susan Hutchinson, U Virginia, & Ruggero Cesaria of IRSO (Rome), IABC project will:

- Explore how com'n & trust are related with cross-cultural stakeholder groups & constituencies
- Yield an index measuring org'l trust across geography & industries
- Develop training guidelines for mgmt of cross-cultural com'n
- Identify similarities & differences in trust models for org'ns & industries in various parts of the world

PRSA METHODOLOGY MAKES IT COMPOSITE OF ALL ELEMENTS OF CREDIBILITY

Takes into account a) the issue or subject at hand, b) characteristics & proximity of the public figures, and c) the types of public audiences.

1. Extensive literature review started the process. Then:
2. Content analysis of news media reports '97-98 to identify public figures

3. Two national surveys (2,500 respondents): abstract survey on the 44 identified public figures, issue-based survey on three subject areas -- race, military force & Social Security)
4. Discussions with experts in these areas

BOTTOMLINE IMPLICATIONS OF CREDIBILITY INDEX FINDINGS

1. **Believability of sources varies with the issue** -- affirming opinion leader studies finding that OLs are subject-specific
2. **Choose spokespersons carefully therefore**, since campaigns may succeed or fail less due to messages/appeals than to proper choice of info sources
3. **It's imperative to do research to determine the most credible figures** to use as information source(s) on major issues
4. **Many mass com'n concepts are flawed**. They paint with too broad a brush; misuse ideas of trust & confidence which are not automatically linked to credibility

(More from www.prsa.org/foundation or Richard George, 212/460-0310)

HOW LEADING PROS SEE PR'S CURRENT RESEARCH NEEDS

With a goal of linking scholars & practitioners around the globe, 2nd annual Interdisciplinary Research Conf sponsored by PRSA Educators Academy produced some good work (future issues will report these studies). But a panel moderated by Don Wright made a key contribution in dealing with the dichotomy between what practitioners need & the esoteric or impractical studies that characterize most scholarly publications.

Walt Lindenmann offered 5 key points to make studies useful:

1. Keep it simple
2. Make it relevant
3. Support practitioners in training, meaning give us hands-on instruction
4. Develop models that work (relevant & realistic)
5. Set consistent standards & criteria

Jack Felton: a) Provide practitioners with an executive summary to point practitioners to the good stuff; b) don't just look at successes, but as Sunshine Overkamp says, why not measure failure -- we can probably learn more that way; c) get out of the sandbox, cross your expertise with that of other social scientists (sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists)

Jack Bergen: PR's biggest threat today is the management consultants, e.g., *NYTimes* article re European Coca-Cola crisis, not one quote from a pr